

Testimony of Steve Dlugosz, CCA
Presented on behalf of the Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Program and the American Society of Agronomy (ASA) to the House Ag Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research and the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management
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The Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Program is a voluntary certification program of the American Society of Agronomy (ASA) that only 62% of those starting the process achieve. There are approximately 14,000 CCAs throughout the United States and Canada. Each Certified Crop Adviser must pass two comprehensive exams covering nutrient management, soil and water management, integrated pest management and crop management, meet experience, education and reference requirements plus agree to abide by the code of ethics. A Certified Crop Adviser must earn at least forty hours in continuing education every two years.

Certified Crop Advisers are recognized by USDA-NRCS as Technical Service Providers (TSP) in nutrient management, pest management and residue management or tillage practices. Certified Crop Advisers represent over 50% of the TSPs.

A Certified Crop Adviser is an agronomist, providing both agronomic advice and information as well as, in many cases, agronomic inputs to growers. According to Steve Dlugosz, CCA Board Chair, "being a CCA separates us from the 'peddlers of products'. You can peddle products without the work of being a CCA." The majority of Certified Crop Advisers work for an Ag Retail or Farm Cooperative business while others may have their own business providing only services or work for USDA NRCS, Extension, or state/local government agencies.

A Certified Crop Adviser is committed to working with their grower customers in adopting the best management practices that are both economically and environmentally sound. A Certified Crop Adviser is considered a business partner to the grower because both have a lot to gain or lose based on the recommendations that are made. A recent study by the Kansas Farm Management Association on farm profitability and good management identified eight primary traits that contribute to farm profitability: yield, price, government payment, technology, cost, planting intensity, rent and size. Certified Crop Advisers influence five of them: yield, cost, technology, planting intensity and size.

Precision Ag technology adoption is greatly influenced by Certified Crop Advisers from nutrient management planning for more precise placement and amounts of nutrients added to the land to precision seed placement. One grower commented that he was able to add the equivalent of 100 additional acres of production through the adoption of more precise row spacing without adding one more acre of land.

Soybean rust is the most recent challenge facing Certified Crop Advisers and their farmer customers. Yield losses in Brazil approach 80% when the disease goes untreated. The US produces 40% of the world soybean crop. The location of Certified Crop Advisers matches very well with the soybean production areas of the country as displayed by the maps contained in this

packet. Certified Crop Advisers will be involved in monitoring the crops, providing up to date information and intimately involved in decisions to be made. They will be assisting soybean growers with best management practices, product selection and timing of application. In effect, they will be the “go to” resource for the growers.

Early recognition of soybean rust symptoms can be very difficult due to similarities to other common soybean diseases, however, early detection and action is critical to minimize yield losses. Proper product selection is critical. There are two common fungicide modes of action used to combat soybean rust – protectant and/or curative. Protectants must be applied before rust infection takes place. Curatives are the choice once infection has occurred. The problem is in the timely identification of the disease and application of the correct product. For example, if a grower applies a protectant product to a field after soybean rust infection has already occurred, he is unlikely to achieve satisfactory control and may have wasted his money. Both US soybean growers and their Certified Crop Advisers have never faced this type of decision making before.

Further complicating this situation is the painful reality of product availability. Many companies, such as the ones where I work are receiving only a portion of what they ordered and could be needed if an outbreak of rust occurs. This assumes a single application of fungicide. Current experience in Brazil shows that multiple applications are usually needed of a protectant and/or curative fungicides. Many Certified Crop Advisers are concerned about this situation particularly in light of what farmers think is available. An additional concern is the basic logistics of spraying large numbers of acres in a very short time period.

These concerns are primarily short-term issues. As we gain experience and understanding, the soybean production system will adapt to the requirements for the long-term management of soybean rust. However, the urgency in the short term cannot be overstated.

In summary, Certified Crop Advisers will be a conduit of information for soybean growers. They are a trusted, business partner who will help farmers make sound agronomic decisions. Certified Crop Advisers will be intimately involved in treatment decisions and treatment logistics on the farm as they combat the newest challenge for American farmers.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Certified Crop Adviser Program

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